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AUTHOR Bromley, Stephanie; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a study to assess both interracial and intraracial attitudes in a field setting, using two measures: (1) compliance with a request for help, and (2) juridic judgments. Black and white female college students asked black and white Boston subway passengers to read a description of a (bogus) legal case, involving either a black or a white victim, and to "sentence" the criminal to a jail term of 1 to 35 years. In general, the findings of the study indicate little overt anti-black racism. However, the data indicate that white subjects were sensitive to the race of the experimenter, lending support to the claim that whites have learned to fear blacks. Thus, covert racism might be much greater than overt. The study also found startlingly low compliance rates among black subjects approached by white experimenters, and more severe punishments by blacks when the criminal was white. Thus, the data provided strong support for the assertion that black pride and self-esteem are increasing. Further research is needed, however, to determine if the results were of a local, regional or national nature. (PFS)

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Black and White Racism: An Unobtrusive Experimental Assessment*

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Race and racism have long been topics of concern to American psychologists and sociologists (see Ashmore, 1976; Tomlinson, 1970). While there is little doubt that racism, in the form of white prejudice against blacks, was strong in America until the 1950's and early 1960's (see Maykovich, 1971, for a review), there is some question about the extent of current racism.

On the one hand, some data indicates that racism is prevalent. Thus, several recent surveys (e.g., Friedman, 1973; McConahay & Hough, 1976; Ross, Vanneman, & Pettigrew, 1976) have found that many whites resent the economic improvements made by blacks in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Furthermore, in laboratory settings, even "liberal" white college students have been shown to express a moderate amount of anti-black feeling (Alfert, 1972; Allen, 1975; Baxter, 1973). On the other hand, a number of researchers have found a decline in racism in recent years. Campbell's (1971) large scale survey of white attitudes toward blacks failed to reveal a monolithic anti-black attitude in the general population. Brigham (1974) found that although children still tend to assign more favorable traits to their own race than to the opposite race, a sizeable proportion of traits are seen by children to apply equally to both races. Finally, Maykovich (1971) has documented

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a marked decrease in negative stereotyping of other races among college students.

One possible reason for the equivocality of research on racism is that measurement techniques used to assess racism are reactive (cf. Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 1966). Thus, during the past several years a number of researchers have attempted to develop non-reactive and unobtrusive measures of racism. Researchers also have begun to assess black attitudes toward whites as well as white attitudes toward blacks. Among recent unobtrusive studies of racism, altruism studies have been prominent, with differential rates of help giving constituting the measure of racism (e.g., Gaertner & Bickman, 1971; Katz, Cohen, & Glass, 1975). Aggression studies using the Buss shock machine (e.g., Donnerstein & Donnerstein, 1972, 1975) have also been conducted to measure racism unobtrusively in a laboratory. The results of a number of these altruism and aggression studies indicated that, in certain situations (probably, those where social desirability is controlled), subjects exhibit prejudiced behavior in public.

Although data on interracial prejudice are equivocal, the recent data on intraracial prejudice, specifically black self-denigration, are not equivocal. While the earlier literature found black prejudice against blacks, more recent evidence does not find such prejudice.

The purpose of the present study was to assess both interracial and intraracial attitudes in a field setting, using two measures: (a) compliance with a request for help, and (b) juridic judgments. Black and white female college students approached black and white subway passengers in Boston and asked the subjects to read a description of a (bogus) legal case. The case involved either a black or

white victim. Subjects who agreed to read the case were also asked to "sentence" the criminal to a jail term of one to 35 years.

The principal predictions dealt with the sentencing data. It was expected, because our situation was one in which it was relatively "easy" to express prejudice, that opposite race subject/criminal conditions would produce the harshest sentences. Because there no longer seems to be evidence of intraracial prejudice, the most lenient sentences were predicted in the same subject/race conditions.

Method

Subjects. Subjects were 138 black and 123 white males who were approached while waiting on a subway platform. Subjects were approached according to a procedure designed to insure random selection. Experimenters approached the first male they encountered. If this person agreed to help, and, after reading a description of the case, imposed a sentence, the experimenter thanked him and walked 20 feet down the platform. The experimenter repeated the request with the first male of the opposite race with whom she came into proximity. In this way, experimenters continued to alternate between black and white subjects (who imposed a sentence term) until they had completed their quota of subjects. In all, 42 black subjects and 27 white subjects refused to participate in the experiment. All subjects appeared to be between 20 and 65 years old, and none appeared to be extremely wealthy or poor. If subjects asked for additional information about the study, the experimenter took their address and information was later mailed to them.

Procedure. Four white and three black females, naive as to the

purpose of the study, served as experimenters. After contacting a prospective subject, the experimenter indicated that she was a student doing a class project and asked for two minutes of the subject's time. If the subject agreed to help, the experimenter showed him a description of an "assault and robbery", and also showed pictures of the convicted criminal and victim. The pictures were of both black and white "average looking" males. In the case of the criminal, the picture was of a 25 year old male, while in the case of the victim, a male of about 50 years old was shown. In half of the cases the criminal was black and in half he was white. As well, the race of the criminal was similarly manipulated. As part of the information presented to subjects, it was noted that Massachusetts law required that a sentence of from 1 to 35 years be imposed. Subjects were asked to indicate an appropriate sentence in this range.

The dependent measures were the rate of refusal to the experimenter's request for help and the length of sentence imposed. The refusal data were analyzed by a Chi Square test of significance. The length of sentence data were designed to be analyzed by a 4-factor between subjects analysis of variance (Race of Experimenter X Race of Subject X Race of Criminal X Race of Victim).

Results

As shown in Table 1, refusal rates of the experimenters' request for help were found to vary according to the race of both experimenter and subject. ($\chi^2 = 8.02$; $\underline{df} = 1$; $\underline{p} < .01$). The most striking differ-

Table 1

Rates of Refusal to Participate

Race of Experimenter	Race of Subject: Black	Race of Subject: White
Black	16%	27%
White	43%	24%

ence revealed by the data was that black subjects complied much less often to requests from white experimenters than to requests from black experimenters. White subjects, in contrast, complied only slightly less often to requests from black experimenters than to requests from white experimenters.

A 2 X 2 X 2 X 2 analysis of variance (see Table 2) was then conducted on the length of sentence data (severity of punishment). Most importantly, the analysis yielded a significant 3-way interaction between Race of Subject by Race of Criminal by Race of Victim. The interaction indicated (see Table 3) that the harshest punishment was by white subjects toward a white criminal who had committed a crime against a white victim. The most lenient punishment was by black subjects toward a black criminal who had committed a crime against a black victim. An additional interaction, approaching significance, was also obtained between Race of Experimenter and Race of Criminal. Subjects who were approached by a black experimenter gave longer sentences to white criminals ($\underline{M}$ = 9.47 vs. $\underline{M}$ = 6.15), while subjects approached by a white experimenter did not give differential punishments to the white and black criminals ($\underline{M}$ = 6.02 vs. $\underline{M}$ 6.17).

Further examination of the data revealed that white subjects tended to be more sensitive to the race of the experimenter than were the black subjects. White subjects were much harsher on the white criminal in the presence of a black experimenter than in the presence of a white experimenter ($\underline{M}$ = 11.27 vs. $\underline{M}$ = 5.54). Black subjects, on the other hand, were equally harsh on the black criminal in the presence of a white experimenter and in the presence of a black experi-

Table 2

Analysis of Variance

on

Severity of Punishment Scores

Source	MS	df	F
Race of Criminal (A)	123.52	1	2.56
Race of Victim (B)	27.76	1	<1
Race of Experimenter (C)	138.38	1	2.86*
Race of Subject (D)	77.52	1	1.60
A X B	35.02	1	<1
A X C	147.00	1	3.04*
A X D	0.13	1	<1
B X C	22.00	1	<1
B X D	31.69	1	<1
C X D	48.00	1	<1
A X B X C	3.52	1	<1
A X B X D	282.75	1	5.85**
A X C X D	78.80	1	1.63
B X C X D	13.02	1	<1
A X B X C X D	8.76	1	<1
Error	48.32	176	

*$p < .10$

**$p < .05$

Table 3

Mean Length of Sentence in Years

Race of Subject and Race of Victim

		Black Subjects		White Subjects	
		Black Victim	White Victim	Black Victim	White Victim
Race of Criminal	Black	3.92	7.15	6.75	6.75
	White	8.75	5.41	6.83	9.98

menter ($\underline{M}$ = 5.42 vs. $\underline{M}$ = 5.65).

Discussion

In general, the findings of the present investigation indicate little overt anti-black racism. For white subjects, there was no difference between compliance rates for black and white experimenters. Furthermore, white subjects imposed only somewhat harsher sentences in the case of a white victim than in the case of a black victim. In addition, white subjects actually imposed harsher judgments on the white criminal than on the black criminal. But while the data did not reveal the expected presence of overt prejudice on the part of whites, the data indicate that white subjects were sensitive to the race of the experimenter. Specifically, the observation that whites were very much harsher on the white criminal in the presence of a black experimenter than in the presence of a white experimenter, lends support to the claim that whites have learned to fear blacks (Donnerstein, Simon, & Ditrichs, 1972). Thus, covert racism might be much greater than overt racism.

Interestingly, black subjects were less reluctant than white subjects to express racial prejudice. The present study found startlingly low compliance rates among black subjects approached by white experimenters. Furthermore, blacks were more severe in their punishments when the criminal was white than when he was black. Thus, the data provided strong support for the assertion that black pride and self-esteem are increasing.

The most intriguing finding was the pattern of same race severity in juridic judgments. White subjects were harshest on a white criminal who committed a crime against a white victim, while black sub-

jects were most lenient toward a black criminal who perpetrated a crime on a black victim. An explanation of this pattern of results may be that blacks mistrust the American system of justice, while whites do not. It is as if blacks viewed a black intraracial crime as being outside the province of the legal system, while whites viewed a white intraracial crime as falling most directly in the province of the system. That blacks are alienated from the legal system was further indicated by the spontaneous remarks made by several black subjects. When confronted with the case of a black criminal, black subjects sometimes said they could not "send a brother" to prison, or otherwise indicated that private retribution would be preferable to using the white-dominated public system. It should be noted that the compliance results can also be interpreted in terms of an alienation hypothesis. A white college student may have appeared to the black subjects as a symbol of the dominant system. The high refusal rates by black subjects to white experimenters may well have been, therefore, a symptom or expression of their alienation. The racial tensions evident in Boston during the Spring of 1976 could have provided blacks with ample cause for mistrust of the dominant system. Further research is needed to determine if the phenomenon we found is of a local, a regional or a national nature (cf. Turner & Wilson, 1976).

An additional implication of the present study is methodological rather than substantive. In view of our findings, we may safely conclude that the juridic judgment technique may be a useful tool to study racism. As an attitude measure it provides a useful complement to more direct measures of behavior, and is less obtrusive than traditional attitude inventories.

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